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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
13 November 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Evaluation of American Attitudes
Toward The War

Summary

Hanoi's strategy in Vietnam is based primarily on a belief in its ability to sustain a prolonged conflict for as long as necessary to frustrate the achievement of US objectives. At some point, Hanoi believes, the US will acknowledge failure and elect to compromise.

North Vietnam's strategy for the war does not rest on its analysis of the US political scene or on hope that opposition to the war in the US will be decisive, although it considers antiwar sentiments one of several influences that will help bring about a change in US objectives in Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese believe that Washington's primary objective is to perpetuate a Western-aligned, non-Communist regime in the South, thus blocking expansion of Communist influence over the entire country. This was their assessment of US policy in late 1964 and early 1965 when they pumped in North Vietnamese troops in a bid to complete the takeover of South Vietnam. They did not believe, however, that this was an objective of sufficient importance to the United States to spark a major US military intervention in reaction.

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This judgment of course proved wrong, but a conviction that present US involvement in the war exceeds the requirements of US national interests, and thus is a matter in which Washington is susceptible to compromise, still influences the Hanoi leadership. They see widespread opposition to the war in the United States as confirmation of this view.

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The Basis for Hanoi's Views

1. Hanoi's faith in protracted warfare is based on long revolutionary experience and is sanctified by both Vietnamese and other Communist doctrine. But the current emphasis on a prolonged struggle is also the result of the difficult situation confronting the North Vietnamese leaders. The US has blocked their achieving anything approaching a military victory. They reject any scaling down of their terms for a negotiated settlement, partly because this would undermine further the morale of Communist forces in the South.

2. Instead, they cling tenaciously to a belief in the efficacy of protracting the war. They seem highly confident of their ability to carry on to a point where frustration of US military and political objectives in South Vietnam will persuade Washington that the struggle is not worth the price, and thus bring about an adjustment in American policy. This is the central premise in Hanoi's evaluation of American attitudes.

North Vietnam's Public and Private Positions

3. In public, Hanoi's assessments often take the militant type of approach used by Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap in his long analysis of the war published last September. Giap claimed US military power is limited because of its commitments elsewhere. He also cited South Vietnamese political and military vulnerabilities as important US weaknesses.

4. By contrast, Giap soft-pedaled political trends in the United States as an influence on US policy, holding out no hope of an early end to the war. This is North Vietnam's standard public position. It is designed both for external propaganda purposes and to condition people in the North and Communist forces in the South to carry on a long, arduous struggle.

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5. In private, Vietnamese Communist spokesmen do not depart in substance from Giap's analysis, but they sometimes are more candid in assessing US political vulnerabilities and in forecasting that political developments will eventually erode US objectives in Vietnam. They rarely claim that these are decisive elements in their strategy, however, and they almost never suggest that antiwar pressures will bring an early end to the war.

6. This essentially long-range view of the effects of the war on the US was expressed by Premier Pham Van Dong [redacted] last April. Dong emphasized the need to frustrate US objectives rather than to foster US opposition. He said that because the US is not interested in negotiations at present, and because it still hopes to impose a military solution, the Vietnamese Communists must prove that they can outlast the US. Once Washington understands this, he said, the situation will be ripe for a political solution.

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7. More recently, a North Vietnamese representative in Paris claimed that the US Government is facing growing opposition to the war both at home and in the United Nations and that these trends "lead to the conclusion that some day Washington will give up." He acknowledged that Hanoi could not drive the Americans out, but he predicted that "after a time, perhaps even a long time," the North Vietnamese hope to gain a "political victory." He said this was attainable if Communist forces "continue to frustrate" US military actions.

Attitude Toward the 1968 US Presidential Election

8. North Vietnam's public approach to the forthcoming US presidential election is the one taken by Giap, who brusquely dismissed its significance in the crudest Marxist terms. Several North Vietnamese spokesmen have taken this line recently when asked if the regime is counting on the election to change US policy.

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9. A high-ranking official in Hanoi reportedly [redacted] "we have to rely mainly on our own forces, not on the American elections of 1968 or 1972 or 1976, or any other time." He said that for Hanoi to rely on US political developments would be as futile as the US relying on Sino-Soviet differences.

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10. Some observers who have talked with North Vietnamese officials recently, however, [redacted] [redacted] conclude that the North Vietnamese are counting heavily on the 1968 election, if not for a change in administration, then at least for a change in US policy. This conclusion is only an impression, however, and is not based on direct statements by North Vietnamese officials. The latter usually avoid outright predictions and rely on expressions of faith that US policy must inevitably change. Premier Pham Van Dong took this line [redacted]

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[redacted] when he insisted that the US must eventually recognize that the Communists are waging a just war and that American forces should be withdrawn. "If not now," he said, Washington "must agree next year and if this party does not agree, another party must agree."

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11. Other reports suggest that although the regime is not ready to count on the election for any decisive change in US policy, Hanoi believes it will be a watershed of some kind. This may be just a vague belief that nothing of substance in the American position will be changed until the election is over. Foreign Minister Trinh asserted last March that there is no prospect of a settlement in 1967 and probably none until after the US presidential election.

Reaction to Antiwar Demonstrations in the US

12. There doubtless are elements of wishful thinking and self-deception in Hanoi's reading of the American political scene. Their experience in the war with France conditioned North Vietnamese

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leaders to count on domestic opposition in the enemy's camp as a potentially decisive vulnerability. This may have been behind Hanoi's reaction to the initial US student protests and "teach-ins" opposing the bombings in 1965, when North Vietnam seemed to exaggerate the likely impact of these developments on US policy. Since then, the North Vietnamese appear to have adopted a more realistic view. They have treated subsequent waves of antiwar sentiment in the US with considerably more reserve. Hanoi played up the recent antiwar "week of protest" in the US, but it avoided exaggerated claims for its influence on the war.

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